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ERIE COUNTY

## Poloncarz points to \$7 million in effort to save jobs

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The Erie County comptroller has identified some \$7 million that could be redirected next year to avoid some of the layoffs and cuts to the arts that Chris Collins intends to impose.

Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz admits he also would like to save some of his own employees targeted for layoffs in the proposed 2011 Erie County budget.

Collins dislikes his rival Poloncarz and the audits he conducts. So he intends to lay off six of Poloncarz's eight auditors, leaving only an auditing supervisor and a 65-year-old assistant.

Meanwhile, about two dozen museums, theaters and dance troupes would like the County Legislature to restore some \$600,000 that they will no longer share come 2011. Collins offered county dollars to just the 10 large organizations that he says draw tourists from outside Erie County. The 10 would share some \$4.4 million in 2011, the same as they get this year.

Collins' budget director, Gregory

G. Gach, said Poloncarz argues both sides of the coin: He asserts the budget has extra money while also saying Collins might be too optimistic in forecasting a 3 percent increase in sales tax income next year.

Even if a few million dollars can be redirected to avert some cuts, it's anyone's guess if the Legislature will act on them.

Poloncarz says that based on past trends, Collins again overestimates the cost of fringe benefits for employees in the county's Jail Management Division, this time by some \$2 million.

He says Collins sets aside as much as \$1.5 million more than necessary for workers' compensation costs, and that the \$3 million "risk retention fund" — used to settle lawsuits and pay outside attorneys — will have \$1 million more than necessary, based on past years' outlays.

Gach, the Collins budget director, disagrees.

"I have read through this report twice now," he said. "And in a lot of ways he is trying to argue both sides of an argument . . . so that no matter what happens, he can say, 'See, I told you.'"

Gach said the budget each year allows for a \$3 million risk retention fund, and this year the county expects to pay out some potentially large legal settlements. He said the estimate set aside for workers' compensation payments is recommended by an outside firm that helps Erie County manage its claims.

Poloncarz again notes that Collins continues his strategy to further strip budget oversight powers from the Legislature.

Poloncarz said that with the staffing cuts he's facing, his office will be less able to provide financial information to the Legislature. He fears that lawmakers are rapidly becoming less of a check on the county executive's power—especially if they allow those budget resolutions to go through unchanged.

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## Comments

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